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## Make it so!

*Follow these five steps to make sure your 2010 plans for progress don't stall.*

**By Tim Smith, Principal**

Anyone who has ever worked in corporate America has seen them ... the big binders, up on the shelf in an office, filled with massive plans for this initiative or that strategy.

Mostly all they do is collect dust. No one ever looks at them. The point of the plan was the plan itself. Any recommendations or action items are promptly forgotten in the daily rush of the "real" business.

Companies that are serious about making progress understand that execution is the most important part of the process. It does no good to invest time and effort in a plan for progress that no one follows. Yet it happens all too frequently.

With 2010 just around the corner, many businesses will begin making plans for the next year. Will you? And if you do, will you create a plan that you can carry out, regardless of what else is going on around you?

### Work gets in the way

A client of mine spent time earlier this year identifying the main causes of the company's biggest "headaches" and defining steps to prevent those issues. Unfortunately, his company hasn't made any progress yet – they are all too focused on day-to-day work.

The company's plans are solid but there has been no execution, and the problems they identified continue to

be problems – causing them to work even harder. The endless focus on work that pays the bills keeps the company's managers and employees from ever improving their situation.

It's like a merry-go-round that never stops.

This example of "planning but no execution" is very common. Businesses of all sizes often fail to carry out the plans they develop, and the reason is always the same – work gets in the way. But it doesn't have to be that way – a few simple tips can help any business plan and execute more effectively. And the end results are amazing.



## Wise words

Alfred North Whitehead – an English philosopher and Harvard professor, who lived from 1861 to 1947 – once said: “The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.”

I don't know how much Professor Whitehead knew about business, but he sure understood human nature. It's difficult even in the best of times to implement new initiatives or strategies when there are other, seemingly more pressing, things to do.

His famous quote carries a lot of weight for business managers. If we extrapolate a tad – which I don't think he'd mind – he is basically saying that your business can be more focused, productive and profitable when you maintain what you have AND make improvements, too.

In other words, if you allow day-to-day work to stand between you and progress, you're tacitly saying that you're satisfied with the current state of affairs – that the status quo is good enough.

On the other hand, if you are *dissatisfied* with the status quo and you want your business to become healthier financially and operationally, you have to practice what Professor Whitehead describes as the “art of progress.”

## Execution and the art of progress

Okay, so how do we practice the art of progress? The most important element in executing plans is to make certain you don't bite off more than you chew. Start with the end in mind, keep it manageable and break it down into morsels that managers and staff members can handle – while they continue to work on the daily tasks that keep the business running.

Here are five steps that can help any business plan – and execute – more effectively:

1. Describe what you want to see as the state of your business 24 to 36 months from now. (You can learn more about how to do this by reading The Plaid Group's November 2005 newsletter titled “[Getting From Here to There.](#)”)
2. Define a select few goals to accomplish by 12 months from now. Keep it simple, and don't generate a long “laundry list.”

3. For each goal, outline the basic steps you'll take to reach the goal. This is the path you'll follow.
4. Define what you want to accomplish three, six and nine months from now. These are the tangible outcomes you want to see at the end of those periods.
5. Now, focus on what you want to have done three months from now. What do you need to complete during the coming 30 days, the 30 days after that, and the final 30 days, in order to accomplish your three-month goal?

Through these five steps, you've taken a big goal – how you want to see your business in the future – and broken it down into simple steps that people can fit into their daily schedule without feeling overwhelmed.

After you've defined your plans for tackling these projects – and communicated everyone's individual responsibilities – follow up with your team informally at least every two weeks to keep the projects top of mind.

At the end of 30 days, review your team's progress and deal with any obstacles. At the end of 90 days, go back to Step 5 and break down the work you want to accomplish during the next three months.

By following these steps, you can ensure your company is moving forward and making progress on its goals. The company benefits even if it takes longer than anticipated to achieve your goals.

Professor Whitehead would be proud.

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**More Information?** If you'd like to learn more about how to transform plans into progress, please send an E-mail to [tim@plaidgroup.com](mailto:tim@plaidgroup.com), call us at (713) 627-3569, or visit our web site at [www.plaidgroup.com](http://www.plaidgroup.com). The Plaid Group publishes a free bimonthly e-mail newsletter filled with insights and ideas you can use to enhance your company's operational performance, spur growth and increase bottom-line profits.

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**Author's Note:** Tim Smith is a Principal with The Plaid Group. The Plaid Group helps companies become more focused, productive, and profitable.